

Tosca

GIACOMO PUCCINI

SOCIAL STUDIES: Historical Settings for Opera/ Becoming the Librettist

Students will

- Read for information and answer questions
- Research an event, civilization, landmark, or literary work as a source for a setting
- Write a brief setting and story as the basis for an opera

Copies for Each Student: *Tosca* Synopsis, “What is a Librettist”, “Our Librettists, Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica“, Activity Worksheet

Copies for the Teacher: Social Studies lesson plan, *Tosca* Synopsis, “What is a Librettist”, “Our Librettists, Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica“, Activity Worksheet, Answer Key

Getting Ready

Prepare internet access for possible research for guided practice or group work.

Gather pens, pencils and additional writing paper as needed for your students.

Introduction

Explain to your students that a commissioned work is a piece of visual or performing art created at the request and expense of someone else. Begin the lesson by explaining to your students that composers and librettists work closely to create an opera. Have the students discuss what they believe the research duties of a librettist are. You may want to guide the discussion so that the students begin to understand the historic and cultural influence on opera and art as a whole. Have your students read the synopsis, “What is a Librettist”, and “Our Librettists, Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica”. Give each student a copy of the Activity Worksheet or display it on a screen. Give an overview of the assignment, and point out the information your students are expected to research and write about. To align with Texas TEKS, you may provide and tailor research topics according to your grade level:

6th Grade: Societies of the contemporary world.

7th Grade: Texas history, from natural Texas to present.

8th Grade: United States history from the early colonial period through Reconstruction.

U.S. History Studies since 1877: U.S. History from Reconstruction to the present day.

World History Studies: Societies of ancient Greece, Rome, India, Persia, China, and Medieval to Renaissance Europe.

Guided/Independent Practice

Depending on your grade level, the ability of your students, and time constraints, you may choose to have students work as a whole class, in small groups, with a partner, or individually. Read the directions on the Activity Worksheet. Have students select topics and begin research. This can be done in class or as an outside assignment. Have students fill in their research information, characters, and write a short summary of their dramatic plot. Have students share their answers individually or by groups and tell why they chose their settings and story elements.

Evaluation

Have students present their ideas to the class for discussion and evaluation. The teacher may want to guide the discussion.

For Further Study

Students may want to do additional research on librettists or civilizations and landmarks in which to stage a drama or other related topics online or in their school library. Their findings can be shared with the class at the beginning of a later lesson.

If time allows

If time allows, have students write the words to a short two-line aria that will be sung by one of the main characters in their opera.

TEKS

Social Studies

6th Grade

(16) Culture

The student understands that all societies have basic institutions in common even though the characteristics of these institutions may differ. (A)

(21) Social studies skills

The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. (A)

7th Grade

(21) Social studies skills

The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. (A)

8th Grade

(23) Culture

The student understands the relationships between and among people from various groups, including racial, ethnic, and religious groups, during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. (C)

(29) Social studies skills

The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. (A)

United States History Studies Since 1877

(26) Culture

The student understands how people from various groups contribute to our national identity. (C)

(29) Social studies skills

The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology.

World History Studies

(25) Culture

The student understands how the development of ideas has influenced institutions and societies. (A and B)

(29) Social studies skills

The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. (F)

Language Arts

6th Grade

(12) Analyze characters, including their traits, motivations, conflicts, and relationships. (F).

7th Grade

(12) Analyze characters, including their traits, motivations, conflicts and relationships. (F).

8th Grade

(12) Analyze characters, including their traits, motivations, conflicts and relationships. (F).

English Language Arts and Reading, English I

(5) Analyze how authors develop complex yet believable characters in works of fiction through a range of literary devices, including character foils. (B).

English Language Arts and Reading, English II

(5) Analyze differences in the characters' moral dilemmas in works of fiction across different countries or cultures. (B).

English Language Arts and Reading, English III

(5) Analyze the internal and external development of characters through a range of literary devices. (B).

English Language Arts and Reading, English III

(5) Analyze the internal and external development of characters through a range of literary devices. (B).

English Language Arts and Reading, English IV

(5) Analyze the moral dilemmas and quandaries presented in works of fiction as revealed by the underlying motivations and behaviors of the characters. (B).

Correlates: Language Arts, Drama

Gardner's Intelligences: Verbal-Linguistic, Logical/Mathematical

Bloom's Taxonomy: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Synthesis, Evaluation

Sources

Warrack, John and West, Ewan, The Oxford Dictionary of Opera, Oxford University Press, 1992.

Freeman, John W., Stories of the Great Operas, W. W. Norton & Company, 1984.

Goulding, Phil G., Ticket to the Opera, Fawcett Columbine, 1996.

Tosca Synopsis

Online Sources

www.oxfordmusiconline.com

www.arena.it

www.ricordi.it

Giacosa and Illica Biographies. Accessed on September 16, 2015.

<https://sfopera.com/SanFranciscoOpera/media/Education-Resource-Materials/butterfly/ButterflyGIACOSAILLICAbios.pdf>.

Tosca

Synopsis

ACT ONE

Inside the church of Sant'Andrea della Valle

Cesare Angelotti, former consul of the Roman Republic and now an escaped political prisoner, runs into the church and hides in the Attavanti private chapel – his sister, the Marchesa Attavanti, has left a key to the chapel hidden at the feet of the statue of the Madonna. The elderly Sacristan enters and begins cleaning. The Sacristan kneels in prayer as the Angelus sounds. The painter Mario Cavaradossi arrives to continue work on his picture of Mary Magdalene. The Sacristan identifies a likeness between the portrait and a blonde-haired woman who has been visiting the church recently (unknown to him, it is Angelotti's sister the Marchesa). Cavaradossi describes the “hidden harmony” (“Recondita armonia”) in the contrast between the blonde beauty of his painting and his dark-haired lover, the singer Floria Tosca. The Sacristan mumbles his disapproval before leaving.

Angelotti emerges and tells Cavaradossi, an old friend who has republican sympathies, that he is being pursued by the Chief of Police, Baron Scarpia. Cavaradossi promises to assist him after nightfall. Tosca's voice is heard, calling to Cavaradossi. Cavaradossi gives Angelotti his basket of food and Angelotti hurriedly returns to his hiding place. Tosca enters and suspiciously asks Cavaradossi what he has been doing – she thinks that he has been talking to another woman. Cavaradossi reassures her and Tosca tries to persuade him to take her to his villa that evening: “Non la sospiri, la nostra casetta” (“Do you not long for our little cottage”). She then expresses jealousy over the woman in the painting, whom she recognises as the Marchesa Attavanti. Cavaradossi explains the likeness; he has merely observed the Marchesa at prayer in the church. He reassures Tosca of his fidelity and asks her what eyes could be more beautiful than her own: “Qual'occhio al mondo” (“What eyes in the world”). After Tosca has left, Angelotti reappears and discusses with the painter his plan to flee disguised as a woman, using clothes left in the chapel by his sister. Cavaradossi gives Angelotti a key to his villa, suggesting that he hide in a disused well in the garden.

The sound of a cannon signals that Angelotti's escape has been discovered. He and Cavaradossi hasten out of the church. The Sacristan re-enters with choristers, celebrating the news that Napoleon has apparently been defeated at Marengo. The celebrations cease abruptly with the entry of Scarpia, his henchman Spoletta and several police agents. They have heard that Angelotti has sought refuge in the church. Scarpia orders a search, and the empty food basket and a fan bearing the Attavanti coat of arms are found in the chapel. Scarpia questions the Sacristan, and his suspicions are aroused further when he learns that Cavaradossi has been in the church; Scarpia mistrusts the painter, and believes him complicit in Angelotti's escape. When Tosca arrives looking for her lover, Scarpia artfully arouses her jealous instincts by implying a relationship between the painter and the Marchesa Attavanti. He draws Tosca's attention to the fan and suggests that someone must have surprised the lovers in the chapel. Tosca falls for his deceit; enraged, she rushes off to confront Cavaradossi. Scarpia orders Spoletta and his agents to follow her, assuming she will lead them to Cavaradossi and Angelotti. He privately gloats as he reveals his intentions to possess Tosca and execute Cavaradossi. A procession enters the church singing the Te Deum; exclaiming ‘Tosca, you make me forget even God!’, Scarpia joins the chorus in the prayer.

ACT TWO

Scarpia's apartment in the Palazzo Farnese, that evening

Scarpia, at supper, sends a note to Tosca asking her to come to his apartment. He has been unable to find Angelotti, but has arrested Cavaradossi. As Cavaradossi is brought in and questioned, the voice of Tosca, singing a celebratory cantata in another room in the Palace, can be heard. Cavaradossi denies knowing anything

about the escape of Angelotti. Tosca arrives, just in time to see her lover taken to an antechamber to be tortured. He is able to speak briefly with her, telling her to say nothing. Tosca is told by Scarpia that she can save her lover from indescribable pain if she reveals Angelotti's hiding place. She resists, but hearing Cavaradossi's cries of pain, eventually tells Scarpia that Angelotti is in the well in the garden of Cavaradossi's villa.

Scarpia orders the torture of Cavaradossi to cease and the wounded painter is brought back in. He recovers consciousness and, learning of Tosca's betrayal, is furious with her. Sciarrone, a police agent, enters with news of Napoleon's victory at Marengo; Cavaradossi gloats, telling Scarpia that his rule of terror will soon be at an end, before being dragged away by Scarpia's men. Scarpia, left with Tosca, proposes a bargain: if she gives herself to him, Cavaradossi will be freed. She is revolted, and repeatedly rejects his advances. Outside she hears the drums that announce an execution; as Scarpia awaits her decision, she prays to God for help, asking why He has abandoned her: "Vissi d'arte" ("I lived for art"). Scarpia remains adamant despite her pleas. When Spoletta brings news that Angelotti has killed himself, and that everything is in place for Cavaradossi's execution, Tosca, in despair, agrees to submit to Scarpia in return for Cavaradossi's freedom. Scarpia tells his deputy Spoletta to arrange a mock execution, both recalling that it will be "as we did with Count Palmieri".

Following Spoletta's departure, Tosca imposes the further condition that Scarpia provide a safe-conduct out of Rome for herself and her lover. While he is signing the document, Tosca quietly takes a knife from the supper table. As Scarpia triumphantly embraces her, she stabs him, crying "this is Tosca's kiss!". As Scarpia falls dead, she declares that she now forgives him. She removes the safe-conduct from his pocket, lights candles in a gesture of piety and places a crucifix on the body before leaving.

ACT THREE

The upper parts of the Castel Sant'Angelo, early the following morning

A shepherd boy sings (in Romanesco dialect) "Io de' sospiri" ("I give you sighs") as church bells sound for matins. Cavaradossi is led in by guards and informed that he has one hour to live. He refuses to see a priest, but asks permission to write a letter to Tosca. He begins to write, but is soon overwhelmed by memories: "E lucevan le stelle" ("And the stars shone"). Tosca enters and shows him the safe-conduct. She tells him that she has killed Scarpia and that the imminent execution is a sham: Cavaradossi must feign death, but afterwards they can leave Rome together, before Scarpia's body is discovered. Cavaradossi is amazed at the courage shown by one so gentle and tender: "O dolci mani" ("Oh sweet hands"). The pair ecstatically plan the life they will live away from Rome. Tosca then anxiously instructs Cavaradossi on how to play his part in the mock execution convincingly. She tells him that he will be shot with blanks by the firing squad and instructs him to fall down as if dead. He agrees to act "like Tosca in the theatre".

Cavaradossi is led away, and Tosca watches with increasing impatience as the execution is prepared. The men fire, Cavaradossi falls, and Tosca exclaims "Ecco un artista!" ("What an actor!"). When the soldiers have all left, she hurries towards Cavaradossi, only to find that he is really dead; Scarpia has betrayed her. Heartbroken, she clasps his lifeless body and weeps. The voices of Spoletta, Sciarrone and soldiers are heard, indicating that Scarpia's body has been found, and that Tosca is known to have killed him. As Spoletta, Sciarrone and the soldiers rush in, Tosca rises, evades their clutches, and runs to the parapet. Crying "O Scarpia, Avanti a Dio!" ("O Scarpia, we meet before God!"), she hurls herself over the edge to her death.

The Characters

Floria Tosca: (soprano) A celebrated singer and Cavaradossi's lover. Scarpia uses Tosca's love for Cavaradossi to betray Angelotti.

Mario Cavaradossi: (tenor) A painter and Tosca's lover. Friends with Angelotti, he helps him hide from Scarpia after his escape from prison.

Baron Scarpia: (baritone) The chief of police who is searching for Angelotti after his prison escape.

Cesare Angelotti: (bass) Former Consul of the Roman Republic, on the run after escaping prison.

Spoletta: (tenor) A police agent.

Sciarrone: (bass) Another agent.

Tosca

What is a Librettist?

The titles of many famous operas are normally introduced by the composer, or person who wrote the music. However, opera is a product of teamwork between the composer and the librettist.

The librettist is the person or persons responsible for creating the story and writing the libretto, or words, of an opera. It is his or her job to tell the story in a way that is poetic, easy for the composer to put to music, and easy for the audience to understand. Librettists are often poets or writers who use different sources as inspiration for the plot, or story, for an opera. These sources can be anything from famous plays to literature, historical events or current events, or even their imagination.

While some librettists may use a pre-existing source for an opera, there is more to being a librettist than writing words or borrowing material from another writer or poet. The librettist must work closely with the composer to ensure the libretto works well with the music, being very careful to consider how the words will sound when they are sung, and whether the plot is conveyed properly. The libretto can be written by a single person or a team of writers.

There have been many famous composer-librettist partnerships with well-known librettists throughout the years, such as Mozart and Lorenzo da Ponte and Puccini and the librettist duo, Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa. If an opera was successful, the composer and librettist often continued to work together on several additional works. Puccini teamed with famous librettists, Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, for his 3 famous operas *Tosca*, *La bohème*, and *Madama Butterfly*. They are often considered the most powerful composer-librettist team in Italian opera. Luigi Illica was a well-known librettist throughout the literary and opera world. Because of his reputation, he received many invitations for collaboration which resulted in working with over 15 composers, and writing the libretto for over 25 operas.

Although they each have slightly different responsibilities, the composer and librettist both have a common goal, and ultimately share in the success or failure of an opera. Communication between them is one of the most important aspects of their partnership. Librettists and composers often communicated through letters throughout the 18th and 19th century. They would discuss their likes, dislikes, new ideas, and the progress of the opera through these letters. Now, in the 21st century, many composers and librettists communicate through email, over the phone, or in person. The methods for each composer-librettist partnership may be different, but the overall goal remains the same; to create a great opera.

Tosca

Our Librettists, Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica

Giuseppe Giacosa

Giuseppe Giacosa (October 21, 1847 – September 1, 1906) was an Italian poet, playwright, and librettist. He was born in Collettero Parella, now Collettero Giacosa, near Turin. His father was a magistrate. Giuseppe went to the University of Turin, studying in the University of Turin, Faculty of Law. Though he gained a degree in law, he did not pursue a legal career. He gained initial fame for writing the poems in *Una Partita a Scacchi* (a *Game of Chess*) in 1871. In 1888, he taught drama and recitation at the Milan Conservatory, but with success, he was able to make a career as a writer. He wrote *La Dame de Challant* for noted French actress Sarah Bernhardt, which she produced in New York in 1891. In 1893, the publisher Giulio Ricordi arranged for Giacosa, Illica, and Puccini to collaborate. The trio worked together with great success, as Illica drafted the plot and dialogue, and Giacosa refined the libretto, which Puccini then set to music. This partnership resulted in the three of opera's best-known works – *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly*.

Luigi Illica

Luigi Illica (May 9, 1857 – December 16, 1919) was an Italian librettist who wrote for Giacomo Puccini (usually with Giuseppe Giacosa), Alfredo Catalani, Umberto Giordano, Baron Alberto Franchetti, and other important Italian composers. His most famous opera librettos are those for *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly*, and *Andrea Chénier*. Illica was born in Castell'Arquato in the province of Piacenza, Italy. He was a rebellious child with a fiery temperament, and his grades as a student were less than exemplary. When he was about 20-years-old, he left his hometown to embark on a naval career. After four years at sea, during which he participated in the battle of Plevna against the Turks, he returned and settled in Milan in 1879. He began to work with a literary newspaper, later becoming a newspaper columnist. In 1882, Illica began publishing his writing (a mixture of prose, satirical pieces, and sketches), under the pseudonym of Luigi della Scorziana. Over the following years he came to prominence as the author of a number of theatrical scripts (although in reality his debut had already been made in 1875 at the Filodrammatico theatre in his hometown with the one-act play, *Hassan*). From 1886 onwards, he began to make his reputation as a playwright. Over the course of the following two decades, Illica wrote for some of the best musicians of the era. He completed approximately 30 librettos, notably including *Germania* (1902) and *Siberia* (1903) for Giordano, *Iris* (1898) and *Isabeau* (1911) for Mascagni, *L'Eredità del Felis* (1891) and, of course, *Bohème* (1896), *Tosca* (1900), and *Madame Butterfly* (1904) in collaboration with Giacosa and *Manon Lescaut* (1891 – 1892) for Giacomo Puccini. His success as a librettist was confirmed in 1891, when he joined Casa Ricordi. The Great War revived his patriotic enthusiasm and in 1915, at 58 years of age, he departed for the front, enrolling in the army as a volunteer. The following year he suffered a bad fall from a horse, forcing his return to Colombarone, a family property in the countryside near Castell'Arquato, where he died on December 16, 1919.

Tosca

Social Studies Activity

The creative genius of Giacomo Puccini and playwright/librettist duo, Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica yielded many famous and successful operas, including the opera, *Tosca*. This story of rebellion, passion, honor, and regret can be re-written to focus on anyone, in any place, and during any time period.

Imagine that you are a librettist and have just received a commission to create an opera. Select an event from a time period, society, or culture that you may have previously read about in social studies as research for your characters and main plot. You may rewrite the story of *Tosca* using different characters, or create an entirely new story. You will need to do a little research on your topics, obtain information and possibly images, write out your idea, and present your plan to the class.

Your Plan

Your plan for a new dramatic opera should contain the following:

1. What event, era, civilization, or society would be the basis for your opera?
2. Tell why you chose the event, time, and place that you selected. Be sure to share your research on the topic, either from the library or web.
3. Who are the characters in your opera? Names are not necessary, but provide a few details about each character.
4. Briefly tell the story you would like to portray. What is the main conflict or problem of the story? How many acts or scenes will be in the opera?
5. If you could choose any musician to compose the music for your opera, who would you choose?

All of this information can be as brief or as detailed as your teacher requests. The basic facts would probably fit on a single sheet of notebook paper. You may use the planning form below. Your research may yield much more information.

Bonus Assignment: Words and Music

While it is the composer's job to create the music, the librettist must write the lyrics and text for opera. Write the first two lines of an aria (song) that will be sung by one of the main characters in your opera. You may write the complete aria (song) if time allows.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Tosca

Activity Worksheet: Planning Your Opera

1. What event, era, civilization, or society would be the basis of your opera?

2. Tell a little about the setting for your opera and why you chose the event, time, and place you selected. Be sure to share your research on the topic?

3. Who are the characters in your opera? Names are not necessary, but provide a few details about each main character.

4. Briefly tell the story of your opera. What is the main conflict or problem of the story? How will the conflict be resolved? How many acts or scenes will be in the opera?

5. If you could choose any musician or composer to compose the music for your opera, who would you choose?

ANSWER KEY

Tosca

Activity Worksheet: Planning Your Opera

1. What era, civilization, or society would be the basis for your opera?

All answers will be unique and individual.

2. Briefly tell about two or three main characters in your opera.

All answers will be unique and individual

3. What place would be the setting? All answers will be unique and individual.

4. What is the main conflict or problem of the story? All answers will be unique and individual

5. Tell why you chose the time and place that you selected, and share your research on the topic, either from the library or web.

All answers will be unique and individual
